

Henriksen leads life of civic participation

By MIKE GALLAGHER

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When you think of George Henriksen in East Clark County and you'll have no trouble picturing descriptions of the man known to many as "Mr. Republican."

He is referred to by some as a fast learner, hard worker, live wire, civic leader, dedicated volunteer and family man. Henriksen has been described as all of these over the years. Today, at age 77, he's content to be known simply as "the ex-mayor's father."

"When she was a young girl, Nan (daughter Nan Henriksen) was known to some as George Henriksen's daughter," Henriksen said with a smile. "Now she's more known than I am."

The fact that his offspring have accomplished so much and are in the limelight seems to suit Henriksen just fine. He's never been comfortable discussing himself, and always anxious to change the subject to the successful careers of his four children. He glows fondly when the conversation turns to his eight grandchildren, or his wife Ellen.

"My story has been well documented over the years," he sighed. Henriksen was born in 1914, the eldest child of Jorgen and Frances Henriksen. Jorgen came from Denmark to Minnesota in 1882, and then to Washougal (Sunnyside) the next year, with his sister Marie and brother Henrik. Jorgen's first job was at Cascade Locks. Later, the Henriksen brothers operated a dairy farm in the Sunnyside area. Out of that they opened their sawmill, also in Sunnyside.

Frances was Jorgen's former pen pal from Brooklyn, N.Y., and sister of the original Camas-Washougal telephone company. "They were pen pals, and one day I just wrote her and asked her to come out and see what she thought of the area," explained Henriksen. "She ended up at the Washougal train depot, with a letter tank in the good old days, around after leaving Grand Central Station, and said, 'What am I doing here?' She never went back to New York, until after my father's death."

Having been in Denmark several times, I can see why they came here," Henriksen said. "All of our green, and the water, reminded me of Denmark. It was like home. It was a wonderful transition for me, living out in Sunnyside."

In 1914, George Francis Henriksen was born. He graduated from Washougal High School and then attended North Pacific Dental College in Portland, Ore. He is now part of Oregon State University. He graduated with hon-

ors and was a teaching fellow at the college while working at a Portland pharmacy. In one class he met a trainee dental hygienist from Pasco, Wash., named Ellen.

"We were married at 10 a.m. and I taught a class at 11:30 a.m.," recalls Henriksen of their wedding day in 1937.

In 1940, Henriksen went into a partnership with Ray Bachelder at Camas Economy Drug for eight years. The store was located where the U.S. Bank is now. Then, in 1948, the One-Stop Shopping Center was built by Mickey Schwary. Henriksen moved to the One-Stop and started Save-On Drug store. Bachelder stayed at the Camas Economy Drug.

"I was advised by half the town that I'd go broke," chuckled Henriksen. "The one-stop shopping concept was new at the time. There was a restaurant, a men's shop, a ladies shop. At that time it was the top shopping center in Southwest Washington. We packed them in with prize nights and drawings. Some nights there were cars parked halfway to downtown Washougal."

Henriksen ran the pharmacy until 1977 when he retired. Daughter Nan, who had been managing the front of the store while George was running the pharmacy, was in a partnership in the store for a short time upon George's retirement, and eventually became the sole owner of the operation.

Community involvement was always a big part of Henriksen's career. "My first activity was as Chamber Of Commerce president in the early 1940s," recalled Henriksen. He later joined the Kiwanis Club, and helped establish a new club in Battle Ground.

"We had a banner year in Kiwanis," Henriksen said. "A lot of the reason for our success with Kiwanis was due to the fact that it was before television. We'd put on quite a show every week. We had 85 members, a real viable group. Our members were from the resident mill manager on down. All of them were active members. We actually had a waiting list in those days."

Of course, Henriksen was very involved the Republican Party. "I was everything in the Republican Party at that time," he recalled, referring to the many posts he held within the local party. "My wife used to say I was saving the world for democracy, while the kids were being raised by a wonderful, beautiful woman at home. I was a great admirer of Eisenhower, and went to a couple of national conventions. That was a long time ago though. Now I'm a mellow old man, and I've forgotten my old gung ho efforts."

Henriksen also headed up the



GEORGE HENRIKSEN (Second from right) is shown here with daughter Nan and grandchildren Kristen Henriksen and Matt

campaign committees for school levies. When the high school was built, Henriksen and the superintendent were good friends. He pledged his support to do anything that was asked of him in terms of rallying support for the levies.

"I'd made up my mind to be the number one Camas Papermakers fan," Henriksen recalled. "You have to have priorities and do the most important things. The schools were a top priority for me. At that time, the main emphasis was to build the high school as it is now. And, of course, so many of the voters thought we were pouring money down the drain, but the money was well spent."

Henriksen says he has only one regret when looking back. "I only wish I could have spent more time with my beautiful wife and kids," he said. "However, they have turned out very well."

The Henriksen's eldest daughter

Joanne, (Coco), is working out at the High School Pharmacy in Camas as a pharmacist. George "Bub" Henriksen is a psychiatrist in Everett. Ex-mayor Nan, is now on the Growth Management Act Hearings Board for Western Washington, a position she assumed last month. Youngest son John, is the U.S. Navy legal advisor to the Admiral of the Seventh fleet, and is stationed in Hawaii.

Henriksen may consider himself a mellow old man, but the fire in his voice rises when asked about the accusations of growth in Camas going unchecked.

"First of all, there is no such thing as no growth," Henriksen said. "Camas, under Nan's leadership, has put together one of the best comprehensive plans in the state. You either have to progress and adopt a plan for the future, or you'll slide backwards. You cannot build

Van Winkle at a recent ceremony held for Nan. The Henriksens have four children. (Staff photo by Mike Gallagher)

a wall around the city. Nan has tried to set Camas up for the years ahead and she has a very good plan to do that."

"The farther you travel in the world, the more you realize that there is no better place in the world to live than right here in the Pacific Northwest," he continued. "We've got heaven right here!"

"How many towns in the United States would love to have Sharp come in, or Heraes Shin-Etsu, or Underwriters? That wasn't done with the mayor and the council sleeping. I don't think you'd find a town anywhere that would turn those companies down!"

In closing, Henriksen recalled a memory of his days as a youth. "I can remember the days when I was a little kid, born with a club foot," Henriksen recalled. "I remember in the main street of Washougal, almost 75 years ago, being down

there in the mud. My dad came from Denmark, and he literally kissed the earth when he got here. He knew what he was coming to. He loved America. He was always happy with his lot in life, after coming to America. I feel the same way now. The country looks pretty good to me."

"We're going to have to absorb more people," he continued. "People have one false impression about the way the world works. They think that just because they live here now, that we shouldn't let anybody else in. Where would be now if back in the days of the mud puddles in the main streets of Washougal we decided not to let anybody else in?"

"God bless America, and Camas and Washougal," Henriksen concluded. "For what they are now and what they will be in the future. Amen."